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INFO RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN 5674
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WHA/CAR PLEASE PASS TO USOAS
SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD
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E.O. 12958
TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TK](#) [UK](#) [BF](#) [DR](#) [HA](#)
SUBJ: SECOND TRIPARTITE CONFERENCE DISCUSSES DRUG AND MIGRANT
TRAFFICKING AND ASSISTANCE FOR HAITI

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On May 9, the Ambassador hosted the Second Tripartite Conference between representatives of the governments of The Bahamas (GCOB), Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) along with representatives from Embassies Nassau, Santo Domingo and Port-au-Prince. The conference followed a December 11, 2007 meeting in Turks and Caicos (Reftel) and continued discussions on how best to coordinate each countries' law enforcement efforts to interdict drug and migrant traffickers in the region, intelligence sharing and assisting the government of Haiti. The conference heard presentations from law enforcement officials from Embassies Port-au-Prince and Santo Domingo on drug and migrant trafficking in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, along with suggestions about how The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos might best assist Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The Bahamian Commissioner of Police raised the idea of expanding Operations Bahamas Turks and Caicos (OPBAT) to include Haiti and the Dominican Republic. It remains to be seen whether or not The Bahamas will formally ask to enlarge OPBAT. The Governor of TCI suggested expanding the scope of OPBAT to include migrant smuggling

in addition to drug trafficking. A working group was empowered to follow-up on issues raised during the conference. The GCOB offered to host the next Tripartite Conference in September. End Summary.

A REGIONAL APPROACH TO REGIONAL PROBLEMS

12. (U) The Second Tripartite Conference, hosted by the Ambassador in Nassau on May 9, 2008 included a delegation from the government of The Bahamas led by Minister of National Security Tommy Turnquest, a delegation from the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) led by Governor Richard Tauwhare and Minister of Home Affairs, Gelmo Williams. (Note: TCI is a British territory headed by a Governor appointed by the Queen. The British are responsible for internal and external security, international obligations and foreign policy. The local government raises revenue and maintains responsibility for other governing matters. End Note). Rear Admiral Steve Branham from USCG District-Seven, as well as the DEA Country Attach and Coast Guard Liaison Officer (CGLO) from Embassy Santo Domingo, the Narcotics Affairs Director from Embassy Port-au-Prince along with the British Ambassador to Haiti and the Dominican Republic participated in the conference.

13. (SBU) After brief introductory remarks by delegation heads, Governor Tauwhare discussed TCI's three-pronged approach to stopping illegal migration from Haiti. This includes efforts to assist the

GOH with trade and investment opportunities, warning Haitians who might consider trying to migrate of the dangers associated with illegal migration and engaging in dialogue with Haitian officials about how best to deter migration. He noted that a delegation from TCI had been scheduled to visit Haiti to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) related to these issues, but the recent unrest and forced resignation of the Prime Minister and his government caused postponement of the trip. Tauwhare indicated that TCI has tightened its laws against illegal migration to insure that illegal migrants can not find employment on the local economy. He mentioned the recent ban on wooden-hulled commercial sailing sloops from TCI ports, noting that the government hoped to expand this ban to cover all of TCI's territorial waters. He reported that a contract had been signed to install a land-based radar system that would be able to track vessels at sea as far away as fifteen miles from the shore.

He hoped the radar would be fully operational by year's end. The Governor stated that TCI was in the process of reorganizing its police branch and would soon be hiring someone from the outside to oversee the revamped police force.

14. (SBU) Governor Tauwhare stated that he hoped the Tripartite Conference would allow for operational exchanges of information between the parties and more joint exercises. He noted that more needed to be done to identify the leaders of drug and migrant trafficking organizations. He hoped TCI authorities could work more closely with the Haitian National Police (HNP). He proposed expanding the scope of Operations Bahamas Turks and Caicos (OPBAT) to include migrant trafficking along with its current emphasis on drug trafficking. He asked the U.S. Coast Guard to negotiate a Comprehensive Maritime Agreement (CMA) similar to the one now existing between the U.S. and The Bahamas.

15. (SBU) The Santo Domingo DEA Country Attach gave a grim view of the drug problems facing the Dominican Republic. He noted that even when air and maritime trafficking is identified, the GODR lacks the air and sea assets required to interdict traffickers. He stated that a regional strategy to combat drug trafficking had the greatest potential for success. NAS Port-au-Prince noted that all of the challenges faced by the DR were also true in Haiti, but often multiplied due to the level of poverty and GOH capacity. She reviewed the current situation in Haiti and remarked that combating drug trafficking is a priority for President Preval. While noting that Haiti had taken a step back in recent weeks, it was making strides. She opined that CARICOM had a bigger role to play in Haiti and encouraged the GCOB to use its influence in CARICOM on behalf of Haiti. She suggested three strategies for Haiti: interdiction of drugs and migrants so as to make clear that these avenues do not pay; assistance to improve living conditions in Haiti focusing on

agriculture and tourism; and capacity building and increasing resources for the HNP.

¶6. (SBU) Rear Admiral Branham noted that all of the participants were committed to take action against drug and migrant traffickers. He stated that the USCG strategy was to maintain a persistent presence in the region. He remarked that upgrading the infrastructure in Great Inagua would allow the Coast Guard to better maintain its presence in the Windward Passage. (Note: Great Inagua (G.I.) is the southeastern most island in The Bahamas chain. It houses one of the three OPBAT bases and under Bahamian law, vessels traveling from the south into The Bahamas are required to stop and clear customs and immigration in G.I. End Note). He encouraged strategic communications to spread the word about the risks of migration and the downside of the drug culture. He pledged to continue joint operations with Bahamian and TCI maritime law enforcement and looked forward to making progress in the sharing of intelligence. He noted that the USG would be donating five vessels and returning a sixth refurbished GOH vessel (a joint NAS, DOD, USCG project) to the Haitian Coast Guard in the coming weeks and hoped these assets would be supplemented with additional assets in the future. In response to the RBPF, he mentioned that law enforcement needed to demonstrate that it was fully utilizing existing resources before asking for additional ones.

¶7. (SBU) Minister Turnquest noted that the RBPF Training College had provided mid-level training for eight HNP members over the past few years. He pledged to continue training the HNP and offered additional training slots to members of the Royal Turks and Caicos Island Police Force. RBPF Commissioner Ferguson raised the possibility of expanding OPBAT into the Dominican Republic and Haiti. He warned against establishing parallel organizations, noting that with the resources of Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-S) and the OPBAT Operations Center in the Embassy in Nassau a framework existed that could be expanded. He mentioned the importance of CARICOM in working with Haiti. NAS Port-au-Prince agreed with the Commissioner, noting that CARICOM can work with Haiti in ways the U.S. can not. The Commissioner asked about the mechanism for sharing intelligence, agreeing that we all need to work closer together.

¶8. (SBU) The Ambassador agreed that expanding OPBAT would be a great idea, noting that if we do not consolidate our assets and use them more efficiently, we could lose them. After a brief discussion about the mechanism for enlarging OPBAT, the parties agreed that the governments of The Bahamas and TCI would discuss expansion internally and, if a consensus developed, make a written request asking to renegotiate the OPBAT agreement to the Embassy. Governor Tauwhare echoed his earlier remarks calling for expanding OPBAT to include migrant interdiction and pledged to provide a written request to do so. He asked if OPBAT could somehow share information with the UN forces currently in Haiti as well as with the HNP and Haitian Coast Guard. The parties agreed to have a working group follow-up on these issues.

¶9. (SBU) NAS Port-au-Prince noted that Haiti has an Intelligence Sharing Center and Embassy Port-au-Prince would explore the possibility of the Center sharing information with OPBAT. She indicated that Embassy Port-au-Prince would encourage the GOH to sign the pending MOU with TCI, if that was deemed useful. She encouraged the GCOB to consider banning wooden-hulled sailing sloops from Bahamian waters and the GTCI to extend the port ban on these vessels to include all its territorial waters. She noted that these vessels are a hazard to migrants who use them as well as a threat to the region and any measures that would keep them from international waters should be supported. Director of Bahamian Immigration Burrows responded that the Bahamian government was reviewing draft legislation that would effectively ban wooden-hulled sailing sloops from Bahamian waters.

¶10. (SBU) CGLO Santo Domingo shared information on the biometric identification methods employed by USCG vessels in the Mona Passage. This information allows the Coast Guard to identify passengers and crew on suspected migrant smuggling vessels stopped in the Mona Passage and has succeeded in identifying a number of criminals wanted in the U.S. as well as those suspected of arranging these illegal voyages. Both the GCOB and GTCI expressed interest in

having biometric identification information available to their law enforcement agencies to enhance enforcement efforts in this region. Rear Admiral Branham indicated the success of the biometric initiative in the Mona Passage has resulted in District Seven expanding these efforts to the Florida Straits and Windward Passage. District Seven cutters are gradually being outfitted with the necessary equipment to carry this out.

CONCLUSIONS

¶11. (SBU) In concluding the meeting, the parties agreed to empower the Working Group created at the December 11, 2007 meeting to continued discussions concerning coordinating available assets and sharing intelligence, standing-up an Operations Center in TCI, planning for future joint operations, determining how to share intelligence/information with the Haitian and Dominican Intelligence Centers and the UN in Haiti, improving security at sea and airports and following-up on the draft legislation that would ban wooden-hulled commercial freighters in The Bahamas and from the territorial waters of TCI. The parties agreed that the Working Group be expanded to include representatives from Embassies Santo Domingo and Port-au-Prince. Finally, Embassy Nassau indicated that it would await formal requests from the GCOB and GTCI to expand OPBAT before taking any further steps. The GCOB offered to host the next Tripartite Meeting in September 2008.

COMMENTS

¶12. (SBU) The Second Tripartite Meeting continued the momentum generated by the first meeting last December in Grand Turk. The parties were pleased to hear the perspective of officials from the U.S. and British Embassies in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Absent a commitment of significant additional USG resources to OPBAT, it is unlikely that the GCOB will seriously push to expand it. The RBPF Commissioner's proposed expansion of OPBAT appeared to be off the cuff and not a result of internal discussions within the GCOB. Governor Tauwhare's idea to expand OPBAT to include migrant interdiction is more likely to result in a formal request for consideration from the GTCI. Should the USG decide to move forward with a "Mini Merida" for the Caribbean, expanding OPBAT to Haiti and the Dominican Republic and upgrading the infrastructure in Great Inagua would be excellent uses for additional funding. Post will discuss septel the requirements and benefits of upgrading Great Inagua. End Comment.

¶13. (U) Embassies Santo Domingo and Port-au-Prince cleared this cable.

Elmo